

Domestic Servants and Rural-Youth Urban Migration in Nigeria: Issues for National Intervention

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Abstract

The study examined the use of children and youths as domestic servants in Ekiti and Ondo States of Nigeria. Using a snowballing technique in selecting 80 respondents from the two states, findings of the study shows that the domestic servants were mainly from Benue and Oyo States and Republic of Benin/Togo. They are young and mostly females with low educational background. Reasons for working as domestic servants include inability to pay school fees, low academic performance, and parent's separation and family problems. There is no definite contract of employment or specifications for jobs done. They work for long hours with no compensation; living conditions are poor and have no definite plan for future. The study recommends that the Federal government should map out policies and programmes to reduce poverty and encourage basic education with special consideration for the girl child in poor rural areas of Nigeria.

Key Words: Domestic Servants, Livelihood, Migration, Rural-Youth.

1. Introduction

The number of child workers around the world, according to ILO's report (1996), remains extremely high with 73 million children from 10-14 years old now employed worldwide. Children have always worked in Nigeria. However, the figures have significantly increased over the years. A staggering 15 million children under the age of 14, according to UNICEF (2006), are working across Nigeria. Many are exposed to long hours of work in dangerous and unhealthy environments, carrying too much responsibility for their age. Working in these hazardous conditions (with little food, small pay, no education and no medical care) establishes a cycle of child rights' violations. Child labour does mostly occur in semi-formal and informal businesses with hundreds of thousands of young domestic servants, mainly working for prosperous urban families.

Child labour, according to Akinrimisi (2002), stems from the traditional communal system of living which recognizes the key roles played by every member of the family (both nuclear and extended) in sustenance. Thus in the past, parents encouraged their children to live with other close or distant family members. This was done, in some cases, where it was difficult for the parents of such young person's to take care of them and at the same time to provide support for a young couple that might require some form of domestic assistance when they did not have children of their own or when such children were still very young. The relationship then was based on mutual benefits such that the young person assisted the host family by carrying out domestic chores that were never quantified in monetary terms. On the other hand, the host family took care of the young person by providing for his/her daily up-keep and training in form of skills acquisition that could enhance his/her quality of life and enable him/her to be self-reliant in the future (Akinrimisi, 2002). Most of these children suffer broken promises of unfulfilled educational career made by the 'benefactors' as well as from verbal, psychological, physical, mental and sexual abuses. With time and changes in societal values, the issues of traditional extended families and the attendant problem of child abuse led to the reduction and disappearance of children living with their extended family members. On the contrary, the trend now (in most cases) is for a married woman to employ a young person (whose age can be as low as 6 and as high as 20 or more) and pay the individual a certain fee for services rendered on a monthly, quarterly or yearly basis.

The end of the oil boom in the late 1980's coupled with mounting poverty has driven millions of children into labour. Child labour predominates in Africa because African countries are more rural than other continents of the world and are dominated by household production, small and fragmented land holdings coupled with labour market. Women shoulder a larger proportion of the economic tasks in African agricultural sector and most of the works in the households are done by women. Poverty was seen as the actual cause of child labour. In most cases, children are forced to work for their own and their family's survival. The money earned by a child who is a member of a family has become a significant part of poor families' income. Poverty, according to Arinze (2006) can make someone act like an animal, as it is animalistic to trade the health of one's child for money. Jinta (2007) opined that poverty is not actually the real cause of child labour but proliferation of children by poor women.

He believes that if the poor people had limited the number of children to one or two, which they can cater for, it might prevent the incidence of child labour. Okali *et al* (2001) identified characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic background, socio-economic status, educational status and religion influence as factors influencing child labour in Nigeria.

A death in the family could possibly lead to stoppage of schooling of a promising child thereby pushing to menial jobs on the street such as hawking bean cake and fruits. Such tragedy may necessitate the employment of the victims as a servant in another household. Chukwuezi (1999)'s study in Anambra State Nigeria found that many Igbo families encourage their siblings to move to urban areas, believing that staying in the village will not bring financial success. ILO (1996) is of the opinion that child labour exacerbates as a result of the rapid global urbanization. Sometimes, children work to help pay off a loan incurred by the family (Grootaert, 1995; IPEC). In some cases, parents give their children to outsiders to work without pay in exchange for better living conditions in houses of wealthy people (IPEC). Child labour also results from the system of apprenticeship, in which a child is sent to work to learn a trade. The truth is that they work more than they learn (Grootaert 1995). Children working as child laborers are denied a happy childhood. Numerous children in countries of Asia and Africa have to work throughout the day for money or for a monetary obligation of their parents (IPEC). Young boys are put into agriculture and other activities as soon as they are old enough to perform the tasks (Grootaert 1995). Girls are made to do household and domestic work as soon as they barely learn to do them. This leaves the child with little or no time for recreation. These children do not get time to play with other children.

Maid and male servants perform a variety of household services for an individual or a family, ranging from providing care for children and elderly dependents to cleaning and household maintenance known as housekeeping. Responsibilities may also include cooking, doing laundry and ironing, food shopping and other household errands. Some domestic workers live with the household where they work. Though they often have their own quarters, their accommodations are not usually as comfortable as those reserved for the family members.

In some cases, they sleep in the kitchen or small rooms, such as a box room sometimes located in the basement or attic Wikipedia, (2006).

Maids and male servants in Nigeria are sometime exploited by their employers and used as cheap labour. They have no official watch group that tries to still the abuse they suffer in the respective households. Early to rise, and the last person to retire to bed, they bear the brunt of work in Nigeria for most of the day, without any respite, or overtime. Their salary is fixed, and their day off work is nil. Servants endure physical, verbal, mental and sexual assaults. There are sordid tales of broken promises, for education, of starvation and of rise in inferiority complex. In many cases, these under-aged boys and girls get the so called employments through "agencies" based in the cities. These agencies hook them up with households and given them away to sub-employers without even screening the latter. These kids work day in day out, all year round and in the end more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of their pay goes to the agencies. Their parents back in the villages received just a pittance of the children's pay (which doesn't deserve to be called a pay in the first place) and the cycle continues. Across West Africa, millions of girls and less often boys are effectively sold into "slavery" as domestic workers. Many are kept under lock and key and have no contact with anyone outside their employers – no one to turn to for help. Once, away from their families, the girls are at the mercy of the agencies that, in some cases, move them from household to household pocketing their wages. A report by UNICEF on children and work indicates that a growing number of children living on the streets of African capitals are suffering social dislocation, homelessness, exploitation and abuse in all forms.

At least 100 million children worldwide live at least part of their time on streets and work in the urban informal sector. The bad ones can visit some calamity on an otherwise stable household. The sultry ones can boast of the number of men who had crossed their legs. The devilish ones would plot to usurp the madam of the house.

Working children, according to UNICEF (2006), have no time or energy to go to school. About six million working children in Nigeria, equally split between boys and girl, do not attend school at all, while one million children are forced to drop out due to poverty or because of parents' demand to contribute to the family income. Today's child worker will be tomorrow's uneducated and untrained adult, forever trapped in grinding poverty (ILO, 1996). The issue of rural-youth migration for domestic servants in Nigeria is a major concern. Despite the introduction of Universal Basic Education by the Federal Government of Nigeria, a lot of school-age children/youths are taken to urban cities to work in various capacities as domestic servants. These children/youths usually return home at the end of the year for end-of-the year festivities after which they repeat the cycle again. One begins to wonder that in the second decade of 21st Century, some groups of people still engage in sending their children out as servants. Certain questions came to mind among which are: Where are these domestic servants from? What are their tribes or countries? Why do they engage in the work as domestic servants as at now? What are their challenges? Do the children enjoy the work? If no, how what are their plans for the future?

The research work is carried out purposely to examine the motives behind sending out children for servant hood as well as to investigate if the children have any contract of employment, assess their living conditions and the consequential effect(s) of servant hood on their livelihood and future.

2. Methodology

The study was carried out in Ondo and Ekiti States of Nigeria. Ondo State shares boundary with Ekiti in the West, Edo State in the South, Ogun State in the East and Osun State in the North while Ekiti shares boundary with Kwara State in the North, Kogi State in the West, Osun State in the East, and Ondo State in the South, Ondo State falls between the mangrove and the rain forest Zones. The area has a mean annual rainfall ranging from 3000-2000mm and a temperature range of 17.5 to 27 degree centigrade. The relative humidity of the state is above 60 percent.

Ekiti State falls within the rain forest Zone. The mean annual rainfall of Ekiti State is 2400-2000mm while the temperature ranges from 20-27 degree centigrade.

The study was carried out in the two State Capitals (Ado-Ekiti and Akure). The State capitals were purposively selected due to the large concentration of middle level income earners who can afford the services of domestic servants. Another possible reason why large concentrations of the child workers are located in the State Capital is urbanization and the perceived existence of "good life" which attracts the servants.

A snowball sampling technique was employed in selecting 80 domestic workers as well as their employers. Two structured interview questionnaires were used to collect data. One instrument was administered on the domestic servants and the other was administered on their employers. The data was subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses.

3. Result and Discussions

3.1 Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Table 1 shows that most of the respondents (66.25%) hail from Benue State and from Igede tribe while 18.75 and 15.9% came from Shaki in Oyo State and Togo/Republic of Benin. Majority of respondents (65.0%) was within the age of 15-20 years, while 15.0 of them were below 15 years. The mean age of the respondents is 17.2 years, mostly females (66.25%) with 33.7% males. Most of the respondents (56.2%) attained Junior Secondary School education while those with primary and secondary education accounted for 32.5 and 3.6% respectively. 7.5% of the respondents had no formal education at all. About 95.0% of the respondents came to Ondo and Ekiti States through agents which they normally refer to as uncle, while 5.0% came directly through their own parents. Most of the respondents' parents (52.5%) were aware of the type of job their children are going to do. Most of the respondents work as domestic servants because of inability of their parents to pay their schools fees. Others did domestic work because of poor academic performance in school. Other reasons given include: family problems, low standard of living and peer group influence by 13.0, 12.0 and 7.0% of the respondents respectively (fig.1).

Most of the youths are of secondary school ages and most females and had their parents' consent before embarking on the job.

This is in line with the World Banks' view of poverty among the Philippines which is described with the following analogy. 'Poverty is a woman sending her children to beg in the traffic rather than to school, otherwise there will be nothing to eat. The mother knows she is repeating the cycle that trapped her; but there is no way out she can see' (World Bank, 1999)

It is worth noting that in many cases, there is no blood relationship between the domestic servants and the agents/uncles and that their employers often did not know their parents. The employers indicated that they have informal linkage with the agents yearly in request for domestic servants. The major reasons adduced by participants for engaging in domestic work include inability to pay school fees, family problems, and separation of their parents, peer group influence and crave for improved standard of living (Fig 1). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) held that children living in poverty are those who experience deprivation of the materials, spiritual and emotional resources needed to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society." Poverty has also been linked to a greater likelihood of adolescents dropping out of high school (Teachman *et al* 1997). It is also confirmed that children from families that experience deep poverty are more likely to have low academic achievement, drop out of school, and have health, behavioral, and emotional problems when compared with children from more affluent families. The high number of females involved is a pointer to the claims of Odejide (1977) that poverty has a predominantly female face.

3.2: Contract of Employment

Table 2 shows the Contract of Employment of domestic servants in terms of nature of work, and number of hours engaged on the job, wages/salaries and mode of payment.

3.3: Nature of work done

The domestic servants engaged in a variety of work with 72.5% doing diverse domestic household chores, 32.5% involved in farming, 12.5% engaged in bricklaying and security guards while 20.0% were gardeners. Most of domestic servants (66.25%) were not aware of the type of job they would engage in before leaving their hometown or country. Neither were they aware of who would be their employers.

3.4: Hours of work

About 60.0% of the respondents indicated that they had no specific working hours, 12.5% worked for 12 hours daily while 27.5% worked for 9 hours. Most of them (90.0%) worked both on week days and at weekends with 95.75% of them not receiving any pay or compensation for weekend jobs.

3.5: Wages and Salaries

The wages/salaries paid to domestic workers vary with 66.25% of respondents earning ₦6, 000.00 per month while 18.2% and 2.5% earn ₦7, 000.00 and ₦8, 000.00 respectively. It is worth noting that 12.5% of respondents earns below ₦5, 000.00 monthly. 62.5% of the respondents indicated that the money was usually collected by the agent who brought them to the workplace. 31.25% collected their wages by themselves while 6.25% of the respondents indicated that their parents collect their wages.

Most of the domestic servants did not have any bank account but their wages were collected by hand by the uncle/agent on their behalf at the completion of the job (usually at the end of the year). Some agents collect 3 months' salary in advance from the employer before bringing the domestic servants plus Agreement fee ranging from ₦6, 000.00 – ₦8, 000.00, while others collect only transport fare and Agreement fees from the employer. The money is used by the agent in transporting the domestic servants from their States of origin to different towns/cities where they are needed. The balance of the 9 months salary is received at the completion of the programme. This leaves the domestic servants to depend on their employer for sustenance for the whole period (one year) in terms of clothing, feeding and shelter. It could be inferred that there are no definite contract of employment between the domestic servants and their employers. The wages/salaries, working hours and working days vary. However, the amount of money paid to the agents before bringing them was slightly uniform for servants brought in by a particular agent.

3.6: Living Conditions of Domestic Servants

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents do not sleep in decent locations like their employers and families. Their sleeping point include garage (27.5%) kitchen (12.5%) guestrooms (10.0%,) and boys quarters (42.0%).

3.7: Feeding

About 68.0% of the respondents indicated that they didn't eat the same type of food with their employers and that their quality of food is usually very low relative to those of their employers.

3.8: Clothing

Most of the respondents (60%) provide their own clothing or depends on the clothing brought from home, (27.5%) indicated that the employers provide their clothing while (12.5%) said clothing were provided by their parents.

Health Care

The respondents mostly (42.73%) depend on the employer for medical care when ill while a good proportion (66.25%) indicated that they never took ill since they left home. Most of them agreed with the fact that those who brought them (uncle or agent) cared less about their health problems and they see complaints about health issues as signs of weaknesses which may lead to their repatriation of the young people back to the village.

3.9: Recreation

Efforts were made to investigate when and how they spend their leisure and with whom. Most of the respondents (67.5%) indicated that they hardly have leisure time. They (67.5%) spent time either alone or watching television while their masters are out of the house while the rest had the privilege of playing with the children of their employers.

It could be inferred that the living conditions of the domestic servants is poor and that this depends on each employer. This is expected as the servants are young and under the control of a master. They have no voice. Even if they speak, who will listen?

3.10: Employee's Rating

While rating their employers vis-à-vis the treatment given to servants relative to the type of treatment they were used to from their parents, most of the respondents (56.25%) indicated that they were poorly treated, 15.6% rated their employers good, 12.5% were indifferent, and 10.0% rated them very good while 6.25% indicated that their employers were very bad (Fig. 2)

3.11: Vision of the Children Workers

Attempt was made to find out the future plan of the domestic servants. Most of them (35.0%) were not certain about what to do in future, 16.25% contemplated going back to school, 32.6% planned to continue with the job but desired another location 12.5% wished to learn a vocation while 3.75% wanted to embark on trading (Fig. 3) It could be inferred that most of the youths engaged in domestic servants' work have no definite plan for their future. Those with plan might not be able actualize it as they might lack the resources required to implement the plans. These are pointers of poverty.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was carried out to investigate the migration of youths to urban areas to work as domestic servants in Ekiti and Ondo States of Nigeria. A snowball sampling technique was employed in selecting 80 respondents utilized in the study. Findings revealed that most of the domestic servants were from Igede tribe in Benue State of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. Reasons adduced for engaging in the work include inability to pay school fees, academic performance, parents' separation, low standard of living and peer group influence. There is no definite contract of employment for these servants. The general condition of living of the domestic servants is poor and depends strictly on their employer. Most of them were of the opinion that their employers treated them badly. However, they have no definite plan for the future.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the Government should intensify efforts in stressing the need for schooling among the rural poor.

Universal free or subsidized education programmes should be introduced in these areas. There is need to introduce system of motivating the parents/children through scholarships to encourage schooling among children of the poor.

Laws should be enacted on the ills of child/youth trafficking while defaulter should be prosecuted. Micro credit facilities should be made available in rural areas to encourage trading and improve rural production activities. This, in turn, will enhance the earning capacities of the rural people thus making it convenient for them to provide for the need of their children. Female headed-household/single or separated parents should be encouraged to join co-operative societies to improve their standard of living while laws should be put in place for the women's right in the family in case of divorce, separation or widowhood to cater for the children. The women folk should be enlightened on rights in marriage and how to make use of them. Several approaches to rural poverty should be employed in Nigeria to eliminate the menace

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Table 1: Socio- economic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentages
Place of origin		
Igede in Benue State	53	66.25
Shaki in Oyo State	12	15.0
Togo/ Republic of Bennie	15	18.75
Age		
< 15years	12	15.0
15-20years	52	65.0
21-25years	16	20.0
Sex		
Male	27	33.75
Female	53	66.25
Highest level of education		
No formal education	6	7.5
Primary education	26	32.6
Junior secondary education Senior	45	56.2
secondary Education	03	3.6
Parent's knowledge/ of job status		
Yes	42	52.5
No	38	47.5

Table 2: Contract of Employment

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Wages/ salaries		
5, 000	10	12.5
6,000	53	66.25
7, 000	15	18.75
8, 000	02	2.5
Who collect money?		
Parents	05	6.25
Uncle Self	50	62.50
Mode of payment	25	31.25
Do you work during weekends?		
Yes		
No	72	90.0
Do you receive any pay for weekend jobs?	08	10.0
No		
Yes	75	93.75
Working hours/day	05	6.25
12 hours	10	12.5
9 hours	22	27.5
No specific hour	45	60.0

Table 3: Living conditions of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Mode of sleeping		
Garage	22	27.5
Kitchen	10	12.5
Sitting room	08	10.0
Guest room,	06	8.0
boys quarter	34	42.5
Food consumed		
Same with employer and family		
yes	46	32.5
No	54	67.5
Clothing provided by		
Self Employer	68	60.0
Parents	22	27.5
Health care	10	12.5
Depends on employer	35	43.75
Did not fall sick	45	56.25

